QUESTIONS ON LOVING ACCOUNTABILITY

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OVERVIEW OF THE TOOL

This tool is centred on key questions to build loving accountability, in line with the Valuation Framework Grounded in Love of Tamarack's Seeds of Transformation. The tool can support Communication, Program, and Evaluation teams, among others, who are reflecting on what "measuring success" looks like and how data is collected to support this process in a way that centers love, care, and the well-being of everyone involved.

WHAT IS LOVING ACCOUNTABILITY?

Loving accountability can be defined as the process of holding each other responsible for our actions with care, empathy, and love.

Curious to learn more?

- Loving accountability: what is it & how to provide it
- 5 Great ways to practice loving accountability
- In the spirit of loving accountability

QUESTIONS FOR BUILDING LOVING ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is a central part of doing community work through an equity lens. When we take part in work that is done by, for, and with communities, we become responsible to each other and to the communities we serve. Integrating accountability in (e)valuation requires recognizing power imbalances in who gets to define "success" and taking responsibility to change course when the information we're hearing from communities tells us we're not succeeding.

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Decolonial approaches to evaluation teach us that there are different ways of knowing what works, that valuating these forms of knowledge starts with shifting power to equity-denied communities, and that we can centre love and care in how we imagine and practice accountability. The questions below were designed to help you integrate loving accountability in your work and explore qualitative and decolonial ways of conducting (e)valuations.

QUESTIONS FOR BUILDING LOVING ACCOUNTABILITY

What information will give us the confidence that what we're doing is working?

What stories add depth to this data?

How can we collect data in a way that prioritizes the care and well-being of those involved?

How can these measures support learning and improvement?

How can data collection be embedded into existing processes/tools?

1 What information will give us the confidence that what we're doing is working?

Collecting different types of information can help us determine what is working when we are evaluating our work. This information can look like:

- Data from surveys, interviews, focus groups or sharing circles
- Stories, participant testimonials, and lived experiences
- Reviewing documents, case studies or policies
- Feedback from collaborations and partnerships
- Tracking policy changes

Before selecting data collection methods, determine which type of information you are looking for and which information will help you evaluate your work. Centre the voices of those most impacted by the work, and the information they share with you when evaluating whether your work is achieving its objectives.

Ask yourself these follow-up questions: How do we know our work is making a meaningful difference? Who is defining what success looks like? What is working or not, for whom and according to whom?

Tool: Data walks can be a useful process to share and make sense of data.

2 What stories add depth to this data?

Storytelling is a powerful way to convey messages and demonstrate the impact of your work. Stories can foster generative narratives or counter harmful narratives, by centering first-hand accounts and experiences of equity-denied community members. Storytelling can help data come alive and speak to audiences' hearts and minds.

Ask yourself these follow-up questions: What stories and other forms of knowledge may help us understand what the data cannot tell us? Which stories are you gathering and who is telling these stories? What deeper narratives do these stories support?

Tool: Building a Collaboration Impact Story can showcase the collective impact of your collaborative and our Storytelling Tool template can help you write your story.

Story: Check out this example of a story centering equity-denied communities.

RECOGNIZING STORIES AS DATA

Historically, Western ways of knowing have privileged quantitative data (numbers, statistics, etc.) over qualitative data. Stories are, still today, not always perceived as a "legitimate" or "scientific" form of data. Data has also been used to control narratives about certain equity-denied communities or on the other hand, to render them invisible. Decolonizing data collection practices involves deconstructing hierarchies of knowledge, recognizing stories and other forms of knowledge as data, and transferring power and ownership of this data to equity-denied communities. Who tells our stories and how they are told matter.

3 How can we collect data in a way that prioritizes the care and well-being of those involved?

Before exploring any type of data collection method, whether quantitative or qualitative, reflect with your team on how you will be centering the care and well-being of participants and communities throughout the data collection process. Historically, data has been collected from equity-denied communities without their consent or to misrepresent them. Acknowledging past/present harm and working to repair trust with communities can be part of centering care and well-being in data collection.

Beyond ethical and care-centred data collection practices, moving towards data governance and justice requires critically examining the following elements: who decides what information is collected; who has access to data, manages it and/or interprets it; who benefits from the data; how do we know which decisions have been made based on the data and the impact of those decisions; and what happens to the information once a project ends.

Tool: Data walks can be a useful process to share and make sense of data. Ask yourself these follow-up questions: How do we know our work is making a meaningful difference? Who is defining what success looks like? What is working or not, for whom and according to whom?

Tool: The Equitable Gratitude and Compensation for Community Members Guide can support you to think about measures which facilitate equitable participation.

4 How can these measures support learning and improvement?

Once information, data, and/or stories, are collected in a way that prioritizes the care and well-being of those involved, reflect on what you learn from this data and how it can contribute to shaping your work with communities.

Think about how the measures put in place to centre love, care, and wellbeing can support learning and improvement for everyone involved in the process. Explore different models of what "learning and improvement" can mean, particularly in relation to loving accountability. When the information we gather tells us something we do not expect to hear, we can learn, pivot, and improve.

Ask yourself these follow-up questions: Whose learning and improvement are we supporting? What will we do differently because of what we learn, even when the learning is difficult or challenges our assumptions? How are we collectively improving our ways of working based on the information we gather?

Article: Engaging Equity Denied Groups in Ethical and Community Rooted Ways can help you reflect on how to centre care when engaging with equity-denied communities.

5 How can data collection be embedded into existing processes/tools?

Data collection or (e)valuation processes are most effective and valuable when they are embedded into existing processes and go beyond one-time checkboxes to complete at the end of a project or program. For example, embedding feedback forms after workshops or taking the time to meet with community members throughout the year can build trust and strengthen feedback loops in your organization. Reflect on how feedback and data can become part of your work and how it can benefit communities, rather than an additional task we ask communities to perform.

Moving towards equity-centred data collection and evaluation requires building trust through relationships with communities and working towards reciprocity. Embedding evaluation into existing processes should reduce the burden on communities and benefit them first and foremost, not simply make it easier for you or your organization to collect information.

Ask yourself these follow-up questions: How can we ensure reciprocity during data collection and that the tools we use are working/useful for communities? At which points are we collecting information on our projects/programs? What is our capacity to embed data collection into our work?

Tool: Monitoring Collaboration can be useful for participants to regularly reflect on their learnings and monitor progress over time.

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IMPLEMENTING THE QUESTIONS FOR BUILDING LOVING ACCOUNTABILITY TOOL

How to use the tool? On the following page, you will find a worksheet to help you answer the 5 questions for building loving accountability in your own project, program, or initiative. As the questions build off one another, **it is recommended to answer them in order.**

You will be invited to answer the questions using the three categories below: written reflections (head), drawings or visual reflections (heart), and actions or commitments you wish to take moving forward (hands).



What reflections does this question raise for you and/or your organization?



What do you visualize or feel when you reflect on this question?



What will I do next with these reflections? Which actions will I take?

When to use the tool? The 5 questions can be answered at any point during a project. In fact, we invite you to revisit them several times throughout your project timeline.

Who should use the tool? This tool is best intended to serve Communication, Program, and Evaluation teams who are involved or leading (e)valuation processes. We recommend having cross-team discussions to bring in varied perspectives and build from each team's strengths.

Want to continue the conversation? Beyond these 5 questions, we invite you to reflect on loving accountability more broadly with your team, organization, collective, and partners:

- Who are we accountable to and how? What am I accountable for?
- What does accountability look like and feel like? Who decides how it is defined? What does loving accountability mean to you and your organization?
- How are we giving back to the people and communities whose knowledge makes this work possible? How are we embedding reciprocity and relationality in our work?
- How are we holding ourselves accountable when mistakes are made?
- How do we integrate love as a practice in our work and in how we show up for communities?

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TOOL WORKSHEET

This worksheet will help you answer the 5 questions on loving accountability as they relate to your own project, organization or collective. First, define your focus and responsibilities. Then, answer the 5 questions through written reflections (head), drawings or visual reflections (heart), actions or commitments you wish to take moving forward (hands).

Our focus *(i.e. What do we need to be accountable for?)*	*Describe your initiative and/or what your team is accountable for.*		
Questions on Loving Accountability	**HEAD** *What reflections does this question raise for you and/or your organization?*	**HEART** *What do you visualize or feel when you reflect on this question?*	**HANDS** *What will I do next with these reflections? Which actions will I take?*
1. What information will give us the confidence that what we're doing is working?	*Example: Gathering feedback or testimonials from community members on our newly launched program*	*Example: How can we make sure community members feel respected and thanked for their contributions?*	*Example: Organize a community gathering and create space to hear feedback*
2. What stories add depth to this data?			
3. How can we collect data in a way that prioritizes the care and well-being of those involved?			
4. How can these measures support learning and improvement?			
5. How can data collection be embedded into existing processes/tools?			

This tool focuses on building loving accountability in your work, by enabling you to reflect on the ways you can take action to share/transfer power to communities, ensure reciprocity and collective ownership in data collection and (e)valuation. This tool can have both internal and external implications for your team and your work with communities.

An important part of building accountability in (e)valuation work is defining who makes decisions on which data is collected, how it is used, and where it is stored. Using the DARCI framework enables us to identify those who should act as the decision-makers, those who should be accountable and responsible for the work, as well as those who should be consulted and/or informed in the process.

We acknowledge that there may be times when funder demands create tension with some of the core practices this tool explores, but reflecting on loving accountability even within systems constraints, helps keep us grounded in purpose, equity, and trust-building with the communities that we work with and support.

Keep following Tamarack's work to learn more about the DARCI framework in the next Seeds of Transformation tool!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- For more information about the development of this tool, please refer to Tamarack's Seeds of Transformation Framework on page 34.
- Read about How Can Nonprofits Build Trust Through Radical Accountability
- Read more about Understanding Differences between Process and Outcome Evaluations.
- Read more about concrete ways to Decolonize Evaluation from the Emergence collective.
- Learn about OCAP® Indigenous data collection principles – Ownership, Control, Access, Possession.
- Watch the webinar on Data Justice Talk Story by Vibrant Hawai'i, previous member of the Tamarack network.

Looking for more support on building loving accountability and/or strengthening your (e)valuation frameworks?

Connect with us at tamarack@tamarackcommunity.ca for coaching or guidance.